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SUBJECT: ARMENIA LOOKS FOR MOVEMENT TOWARD RE-OPENING
BORDER WITH TURKEY

REF: ANKARA 0159

Classified By: CDA A. F. Godfrey for reasons 1,4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During a January 30 meeting with CDA, DFM Arman Kirakossian indicated that the GOAM would consider a signal from Turkey that opening the border was not contingent on a Nagorno-Karabakh settlement as "encouragement" to negotiate seriously normalization of relations between the two countries. Kirakossian gave CDA a read-out of his trip to Istanbul the previous week to attend the funeral of slain Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink. Kirakossian seemed genuinely touched by his visit, and reported cautiously optimistic notes from his Ankara meetings, but remained downbeat about the prospects for an energized dialogue. CDA emphasized our interest in taking advantage of the window of opportunity in Armenian-Turkish relations that opened following the tragedy. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Following an informal discussion on the evening of January 28, CDA sought a meeting with DFM Kirakossian to press for progress on the Armenia-Turkey dialogue. Kirakossian seemed genuinely touched and pleasantly surprised by his experiences at the funeral of slain Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in Istanbul the previous week. He said GOT officials from the Prime Minister's office and the Foreign Minister's office had invited him to meetings. He recounted that a number of people came by the Armenian BSEC representative office in Istanbul (located just down the street from the office of Agos, the newspaper Dink edited), stopped in front of the Armenian flag, and applauded. "It was very touching," Kirakossian said.

¶3. (C) Kirakossian reported he had met in Ankara with Amb. Resit Uman, the Turkish MFA's Director General for the Caucasus and Central Asia. Uman had indicated that Turkey would not hold hostage any GOT decision to open the Turkish-Armenian border to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. CDA asked Kirakossian directly whether a more concrete statement from the Turks that the normalization of relations was not contingent on N-K would be a sufficient token of Turkish good faith to encourage a more serious reaction from the Armenian side. Kirakossian said it would. Kirakossian said he would soon brief the president, prime minister, and defense minister on his trip, but so far had reported only to the foreign minister.

ARMENIA TO SEND RESPONSE WITHIN 10 DAYS

14. (C) Kirakossian downplayed the prospect of a breakthrough, however, saying that while the GOAM sought "reconciliation via cooperation," the GOT was interested in reaching "understanding on the genocide issue" before engaging on working toward bilateral relations. That said, he noted that the Armenians were continuing their dialogue with the Turkish government and were working on an answer to Turkey's September non-paper. Kirakossian said Armenia's answer would likely be delivered within the next 10 days.

15. (C) Kirakossian did not respond directly to CDA's question of whether discussion on opening the borders (per the GOAM's wishes) and conducting a historical discussion (per the GOT's request) might proceed simultaneously, seeming to discount the possibility. He mentioned that Uman had noted Armenia was the only one of Turkey's neighbors with which it did not enjoy good relations. According to Kirakossian, Uman also offered the example of its relations with Russia, which had been very bad, but now were much improved. "I told him, even with your difficulties, you had diplomatic relations, you had ambassadors. Did you establish a historical commission between yourself and Russia?," Kirakossian said. "He said, 'No.'"

COMMENT

16. (C) If what Kirakossian reported that Uman said accurately describes the GOT position -- that opening the border is not strictly linked to progress on N-K -- then this could be a new opening worth exploration. If the GOAM were to get a strong signal that an opening of the border -- even a partial

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or symbolic opening -- was on the table, we think they could be convinced to begin some sort of discussion on their shared history with Turkey.
GODFREY